N°12

The Grounds and Occaſions of Mens Offences againſt the Clergy,

TOGETHER WITH

The Unreaſonableneſs, Injuſtice, and Miſchief of them,

CONSIDER'D and EXEMPLIFIED,

In our Saviour's ill Uſage among the JEWS.

A

SERMON

Preach'd at the Archdeacon of *Glocester*'s VISITATION, held in the Town of *Durſly*, *April* 17, 1711. and Publiſhed at the Requeſt of Mr. Archdeacon, and ſeveral of the Clergy.

By JOHN JACKSON,

Late Miniſter of *Durſly*.

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To the Reverend Mr. Robert Parsons, Arch-Deacon of *Glouceſter*, And the Clergy of the Deanry of *Durſly*, in that Dioceſs.

Reverend Brethren,

THIS *plain Diſcourſe ventures abroad at the Deſire of Mr. Arch-Deacon, and ſeveral of you. What Benefit it may prove to* Others, *I will not ſay; but perhaps the Matter of it may afford* You *ſome Satisfaction (as it has done my ſelf a great deal) amidſt the Affronts and Inſults the Clergy too frequently meet with from* unreaſonable *Men; whilſt you ſee how exactly theſe Men imitate the* Jews *in their wicked Perſecutions and Revilings of our bleſſed Saviour, and what an eminent* Pattern *both of patient ſuffering in the Cauſe of Truth, and of being glorioufly rewarded for't, you have in Him.*

What is here communicated *indeed has been the comforting Subject of mine own private Thoughts for ſome time of late, under the joint Attempts of* Libertiniſm, Schiſm, Faction *and* Fanaticiſm, *on our* Order, *the Holy* Church, *and conſequently,* Chriſtianity *it ſelf; whereby the Clergy have been (as St.* Paul *of old was) revil'd, and branded with the infamous Character of being* Peſtilent Fellows, and Movers of Sedition *(or in the modern Style, being for the* Pretender, Arbitrary Power, *and* French Government) *whilſt they oppos'd theſe growing Evils, ſo pernicious both to* Church *and* State.

The Share I bore in Calumnies of this Nature (tho' unable to ſerve the Cauſe any otherwiſe than by my Good-wiſhes, I ſuppoſe is not unknown. But (to omit other Proof) I think mine Adverſaries themſelves have ſufficiently clear'd mine Innocence, as to Matters alledg'd againſt me by them, by their way of Proceeding (very peculiar to 'em) which evidently carried the two certain Tokens of Falſhood *and* Injuſtice *in any Caſe,* viz. Treachery *and* Malice. *My Charity obliges me to think as favourably*

vourably as possible of the latter; but I believe never any thing had more of the former, nor more verify'd our Saviour's Words, He that doth Evil hateth the Light, neither cometh to the Light, lest his Deeds should be reproved, *than this Matter.*

I say no more of this (and thus much the Outcries *of some People oblige me unwillingly to say) because as I have forgiven, so I am willing to forget the Injuries done me.*

But, my Reverend Brethren, tho' there be indeed too many Adversaries to our Order, and consequently our selves, yet must it be remember'd (with Honour to their Names) that there are, I hope, more who love and respect both. I can my self speak by Experience, of some (in the Place where I was lately call'd to a Cure, by your kind Appointment, Mr. Arch-Deacon; which Favour, with others, I am oblig'd ever gratefully to acknowledge) who dare speak the Truth, tho' revil'd for't, in vindication of a falsly accus'd Clergyman, and do him that Justice he could hardly find, where he might more reasonably have expected it.

And now after all the loud Clamours that have been rais'd against many Worthy Persons besides our selves, my Reverend Brethren; we see by the happy Event of Things, how much Wisdom has been justify'd of all her Children, *and what* Shame *(if they be not past it) our reviling Enemies ought to take to themselves.*

Which Matters, as they are the Reward of past, so should they be an Encouragement to future Labours in the Cause of Truth; wherein that we of the Clergy, whose Duty 'tis to be Examples to others, may be divinely assisted, and prosper'd by the Almighty Power of God's holy Spirit, is the Prayer of,

My Reverend Brethren,

Your most Affectionate Brother,

and Respectful Humble Servant,

JOHN JACKSON.

MATTH. xiii. 57.

And they were offended in him.

IN theſe Words we have a brief Account of that Reception our Saviour met with from his own Countrymen the *Jews*, upon his Entrance on the Office of Preaching the Goſpel among them. *They were offended in Him*, 'tis here ſaid. And how their Offences againſt him ſtill increas'd, and on what accounts they were taken up, and with how much Fury and Malice proſecuted, and alſo what fatal Effects follow'd them, the Hiſtory of the Goſpel ſufficiently declares. In peruſal of which Hiſtory, when we find the ever bleſſed Son of God himſelf, who *did no Ill, neither was Guile found in his Mouth*, but on the contrary, *went about doing good* both to the Souls and Bodies of Men, ſacrificing Life and all for their Salvation, conſtantly revil'd, threaten'd and perſecuted for his Pains, we need not wonder to ſee his Succeſſors in the ſacred Office of the Miniſtry, who preach the ſame Doctrine He firſt taught, and are engag'd in carrying on the ſame bleſſed Cauſe he firſt undertook, againſt the Powers of Hell, and their Accomplices on Earth, treated after the ſame inhuman manner. Which I ſhall have Occaſion to mention hereafter, when I have ſhewn, as I intend to do, ſome of the chief Grounds and Occaſions of Mens Offences againſt the Miniſters of the Goſpel, together with the great Unreaſonableneſs and Injuſtice of 'em.

And the better to authorize what I intend to ſpeak of theſe Matters, I ſhall take a Pattern of 'em chiefly from our Saviour's Ill Uſage among the *Jews*, and what happen'd to that wicked People for the ſame.

I intend, I ſay, in my following Diſcourſe,

I. Firſt to Examine into the chief Grounds and Occaſions of Mens Offences againſt the Miniſters of the Goſpel.

II. Secondly, To ſhew how Unreaſonable and Unjuſt ſuch Offences are. Thirdly,

III. I ſhall enquire into the ill Effects and miſchievous Conſequences of ſuch Practices. And,

IV. I ſhall deſire leave to conclude, with a brief Application of all to our ſelves, my Reverend Brethren, in two or three practical Rules drawn from the whole.

I. I am to examine into the chief Grounds and Occaſions, *&c.* And I begin with thoſe Offences the *Jews* took againſt our Saviour's perſonal Appearance in the World, which they did not like, becauſe 'twas ſo very mean and deſpicable in all Human Account, and in many Inſtances, as they falſly thought, ſcan-

ſcandalous in Morals. 'Twas indeed attended with many Hardſhips and Sorrows, much Poverty and Diſtreſs, and with the want of all things that ſuch a ſenſual, haughty, worldly-minded People, as the *Jews* were, had a natural liking to, and made the only Teſt of Merit; and therefore they could not much eſteem one, whom they ſaw ſo deſtitute of all; and were ſo blind, as not to diſcern thoſe Noble, Divine Excellencies, that ſhone moſt eminently in our Saviour, and gain'd him the Veneration of all truly wiſe, honeſt, and good Men.

And ſo reſolv'd were theſe *Jews*, that nothing of our Saviour's Perſon ſhould eſcape their Malice, that they began with his very Birth, which they quarrel'd at, becauſe 'twas ſo very mean. His Parents and near Relations were all known to be in a low Condition: They made no Figure in the World, bore no diſtinguiſhing Titles, but were all common ordinary Perſons; and therefore they vainly concluded our Saviour himſelf could be no more worthy their Notice, than any other of his inconſiderable Relations, could have nothing wonderful and extraordinary in him. *Is not this the Carpenter's Son? Is not his Mother called* Mary; *and his Brethren*, James *and* Joſes, *and* Simon *and* Judas; *and his Siſters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this Man theſe things? And they were offended in him.*

And next the *Jews* made a great many ſevere Reflections on our Saviour's Life and Converſation in the World. He had liv'd ſometimes, it ſeems, at *Nazareth in Galilee*, among a looſe ſort of People, as they were reckon'd, from whence they cenſoriouſly determin'd, *nothing Good could come.* He us'd to keep Company too with *Publicans and Sinners* now and then, and therefore they reckon'd he muſt be like 'em, *a Wine bibber and riotous Perſon.*

But that which ſtill rais'd a greater Diſlike of our Saviour in theſe *Jews*, and expos'd him to their uttermoſt Contempt and Deriſion, was his extreamly miſerable Condition. He was himſelf the pooreſt and moſt diſtreſſed of all his poor Family, having *not* (that which the meaneſt Animal had) *where to lay his Head. He had no Form nor Comelineſs to be deſir'd, he was therefore deſpis'd and rejected of Men; a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with Grief*, Iſa. 53. 23. Which very Grief and Sorrows too were objected, and became Matter of Offence againſt him, being reckon'd God's Judgments on him. *Surely he hath born our Griefs, and carried our Sorrows, yet we did eſteem him ſtricken, ſmitten of God, and afflicted*, as the ſame Prophet ſpeaks, *Iſa.* 53. 4.

Thus were the *Jews* offended in our Saviour's Perſon; and how exactly do People copy after them, when they ſcandalize the Miniſters of the Goſpel, with every little trivial Circumſtance,

ſtance, which they can any ways catch up, or invent, of their Condition, Life, and Behaviour in the World?

Perhaps Nature has ſo order'd it, that like their Saviour, ſome of 'em are Sons of Carpenters, or the like Mechanicks, and then they are preſently by ſome wiſe People, reckon'd fit for no other Imployments. They are in Want and Diſtreſs, it may be many times, and then who is not ready to rate their Merits according to their Condition, and impute their Sorrows to their Faults?

Sometime they chance to be ſeen in ill Company (and any Company too can be reckon'd ill for this Purpoſe) and then without more ado, they are preſently condemn'd for as bad as the worſt: Nay, ſometimes the Scandal (ſo variouſly does it work according to Mens different Humours) ariſes from contrary Matters to theſe, as one while the Clergy are reckon'd too free, and looſe; another while they are deem'd too ſevere, and moroſe in Converſation; as moſt of 'em are too poor, and meanly qualify'd for ſome nice Perſons, ſo a few (and very few there can be of this ſort) are eſteem'd over Rich and Great: When they are poor they are deſpis'd, when they are rich they are envy'd, either way the Offence ariſes, when Men are bent upon it; ſo unaccountably perverſe, and childiſhly peeviſh are they uſually in this matter, as our Saviour relates of thoſe Reflections the *Jews* made upon himſelf, and *John* the Baptiſt, neither of whom could pleaſe 'em, tho' they liv'd very differently. *For* John *came neither eating nor drinking, and they ſay he hath a Devil; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they ſay, behold a gluttonous Man and a Wine-bibber, a Friend of Publicans and Sinners.*

And how trivial ſoever theſe perſonal Reflections on the Clergy may ſeem to ſome, who make 'em many times meerly in Merriment, yet they are of dangerous Conſequence, in that they tend to the blaſting Mens Eſteem for the ſacred Character it ſelf, which is villify'd, and expos'd, by any diſreſpect to thoſe that bear it, ſo inſeparably are they united, that one cannot well ſuffer without an Injury to the other.

But alas! ſo little Regard have ſome Men for the ſacred Character of a Clergy-man, that 'tis oftentimes the very thing, which raiſes their Diſpleaſure. We may therefore reckon this a Second Ground of Mens Offences againſt the Miniſters of the Goſpel, *viz.* the high and holy Office they bear, wherein they are inveſted by Chriſt, with a Divine Authority to *watch for Mens Souls*, and pronounce God's Remiſſion and Retention of their Sins. *As my Father hath ſent me, ſo ſend I you. Whoſe ſoever Sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whoſe ſoever*

soever Sins ye retain, they are retained, John 20. 21, 23.

So that the Ministers of the Gospel justly claim their Commission to come from God, and to be his *Ambassadors*, and *Stewards of the Mystery of Godliness*, sent out to publish his Will, and execute his Orders among Mankind. Which dignify'd Office, and weighty Imployment, instead of being welcom'd, and reverenc'd in the World, as it ought to be, considering the Nature and Design of it, meets with great Reproach and Opposition, is decry'd, run down, and branded (as of late) with the odious Names, and villifying Titles of *Priest-craft*, *Church-Tyranny*, *Spiritual Bondage*, and the like: And then what Reception, all who bear this Office, and execute this Imployment, are like to meet with in a profane, licentious Age, any one may imagine.

Indeed he that comes (as too many do) with a Pretence to any other Authority but God's, is welcome to some People, and generally the more so, when he comes with none, but what they are pleas'd themselves to allow him. As our Saviour speaks of the *Jews*, John 5. 41. *I am come in my Father's Name, and ye receive me not; if another shall come in his own Name, him ye will receive.* And the Reason of this is plain, because Him they might reject when they pleas'd, without any Danger of offending an higher Power than Man's. They might hearken to his Doctrine, and obey his Orders, as far as they pleas'd. Which they could not do towards one who should bring his Credentials from Heaven. Such an one, if he had any Regard to his Office (as he would be apt to have) would not be so serv'd; but he would be like to claim a Right to be heard in whatever he had Authority to deliver, and demand Mens Obedience in all Matters his Commission reach'd to, and then to *despise* Him herein (when they had a perverse Mind to't) would be no less dangerous an Offence, than the *despising* that Almighty Being above *who sent Him.*

Which our subtle Men of spiritual Liberty considering, let fly all their little Wit, and greater Malice, at the Priesthood it self, *speaking Evil of its Dignity*, that so by disgracing and invalidating that, they may have the better Plea to reproach them who bear it, and so (which lies at the Bottom of all) free themselves from any Obligation to their Authority, and have a Right to become Libertines.

This is the Ground and Occasion of all those Scandals we hear cast on the Clergy, when they are represented, as Meddlers in what they have nothing to do with, and such as *take too much upon 'em*; when they are call'd proud, and imperious, and domineering over Mens Consciences, for *teaching*, *exhorting*

and rebuking at any time, with that *Authority* given 'em by God ſo to do.

For this Reaſon our Saviour was by the *Jews* blaſphemouſly ſtyl'd, *One that had a Devil*, becauſe he told 'em, *John* 8. 42. He *proceeded forth, and came from God, neither came he of himſelf, but God ſent him.* And for the ſame Reaſon he foretels his Apoſtles, *they ſhould be hated of all Men*, viz. *for his Name*, or Authority, *ſake:* With which Authority he was then inveſting 'em, having firſt receiv'd it himſelf of the Father. And to the ſame Purpoſe, and on the ſame Occaſion he ſpeaks again, *John* 15. 19. *If ye were of the World, the World would love his own, but becauſe ye are not of the World, but I have choſen you out of the World, therefore the World hateth you.* And how this Hatred of Chriſt's Miniſters, on account of their Office, has continued, and been improv'd in the World, I need not ſtand longer to declare. So I proceed,

Thirdly, To another Matter, that often yields Offence againſt the Clergy, *viz.* The Doctrine they preach, which is the Word of God, who will not be *reply'd againſt*, but muſt be believ'd, and obey'd without Contradiction, and without Scruple. *All Imaginations* therefore are to *be caſt down* before it, and *every high thing that exalteth it ſelf againſt the Knowledge of God, and every Thought to be brought into Captivity to the Obedience of Chriſt*, 2 Cor. 10 5.

When the Miniſters of the Goſpel then publiſh and urge this, it raiſes all the noiſy Forces *of Philoſophy, and vain Conceit* againſt 'em; expoſes 'em (as it did St. *Paul* of old at *Athens*) to all the ſilly Jeſts, and profane Scoffs, that the wiſe Folly, and wicked Malice of ſuch Men can heap upon 'em, whom the Apoſtle deſcribes, 1 *Tim.* 6. 4. *To be proud, knowing nothing, but doting about Queſtions, and Strifes of Words, whereof cometh Envy, Strife, Railings, evil Surmiſings, perverſe Diſputings of Men of corrupt Minds, and deſtitute of the Truth.*

And as the Doctrine we preach comes from God, ſo is it alſo of a Nature agreeable to its Divine Original, all pure and heavenly; *teaching Men, that denying Ungodlineſs, and worldly Luſts, they ſhould live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in this preſent World*; that *they ſhould ſet their Affections on Things above, and not on Things on the Earth*, and like their Saviour, be patient and eaſy under the Croſs. Theſe, my Reverend Brethren, are the grating Doctrines, ſo grievous to Fleſh and Blood, we are to deliver to the World. And now 'tis eaſy to imagine how unwelcome, and diſpleaſing, a Preacher of ſuch ſevere Righteouſneſs will be to the Generality of Mankind, that are reſolv'd to be led and govern'd by Senſe, and care little or nothing for

the Things of the other World: How much *derided*, must he expect to be, as our Saviour was among the covetous and sensual *Jews*, who brings so ungrateful a Message and Order to 'em, who tries thus to rob 'em of their Beloved Treasures, and pluck away their Hearts Delight? What wonder to find such a one's Instructions retorted back upon himself, and to hear him tax'd right or wrong, with those very Vices he corrects in others. For by this means, Men who are unwilling to part with their Sins, vainly think to put by the Force of those Divine Arguments the Ministers of the Gospel use against 'em; with the sweet Gain of a Revenge into the Bargain, applying to 'em that perverse, and spiteful *Jewish* Proverb (our Saviour mentions, *Luke* 4. 23.) *Physician heal thyself.*

So that whenever we find Men most maliciously searching into the Lives of the Clergy, and blackening 'em with every Fault they can either find or make (wherein they are usually very good at Invention) magnifying every little Slip of human Frailty, and objecting it as a Crime; when we see the Clergy abridg'd the common innocent Liberties of Mankind, and hardly permitted to live, as the ordinary Wants and Circumstances of human Nature require, we have here the Reason of all this. 'Tis because they tell People, and that from God, *what manner of Persons they ought to be in all holy Conversation and Godliness, not walking after the Flesh, but after the Spirit:* Especially if this be done with that Strictness it ought to be. Which therefore leads us to another Ground of Mens Offences again the Clergy, *viz.*

Fourthly, That Zeal and Courage they use at any time, when they see it necessary, in the faithful Discharge of their Office; when they use a just Freedom and Authority in enjoining Men their Duty, and correcting their Faults, *without Partiality*, and *without Hypocrisy*; but with that due Concern, Strictness and Honesty, so momentous an Affair requires, and their own sacred Function obliges 'em to; when they urge upon Men, like *Ambassadors of Christ*, and as *being in his stead*, the sincere Practice of all things God requires of 'em. Upon those Principles, and by those Motives the Scripture contains; and not with *enticing Words*, or deceitful Promises of *Human Wisdom*; when the Clergy act thus, I say, according to their Function, how usual is it to see the World much offended at 'em? How common to hear 'em villify'd and reproach'd for Men of furious and turbulent Spirits, *who turn the World upside-down*, and preach only their own Passions and Resentments, whilst *with the Terrors of the Lord they perswade Men?* How void of all Moderation are they reckon'd, whilst they endeavour to keep Men from run-

running into that pernitious Liberty of following their own vain Opinions in Religion, and ſo ſetting up another Goſpel of their own, to believe and practice as they think fit.

Hence it comes to paſs, that inſtead of *receiving the Word with Meekneſs*, many an offended Hearer preſumes to inſtruct, and correct the Preacher. And this is the Occaſion that ſo many vain captious People, in mighty Diſpleaſure, high Diſguſt and Reſentment, often run away from our Congregation, and herd in Schiſmatical Aſſemblies (contrary to all Rule, Decency, and Order in the Church, and in bold and open Defiance thereof) where we have reaſon to believe their Vanity and Stubbornneſs are flatter'd, and encourag'd, and made *Increaſe unto more Ungodlineſs*.

And all this eſpecially happens, when the Clergy level their Doctrine, and ſhow their Authority with due Warmth and Force againſt the mighty predominant Vices of a licentious Age, when they expoſe Mens particular darling Sins, and ſtrike at *Wickedneſſes in high Places*, then 'tis they feel the uttermoſt Reſentment of their Adverſaries.

'Twas by this our Saviour ſo much offended the Scribes and Phariſees among the *Jews*: 'Twas becauſe he ſeverely, and openly reprehended 'em, for their notorious Hypocriſies of ſeveral Kinds, which were grown to ſuch an Head amongſt 'em, as that thereby they *made of none Effect* the *Commandments of God*, and ſet up human Traditions in their Room; whereby they made Religion only a Tool to their worldly Intereſt, and a Cloak for all their Villanies, for which our Saviour pronounced ſo many bitter Woes againſt 'em, as we read, *Matth.* 23.

And the like Offence does every Miniſter of the Goſpel ſtill give, who goes about (tho' after Chriſt's Example, and having his Command and Authority for't) even in much ſofter Terms to correct the ſame Vices Chriſt did.

When he dares do ſo, how are his own Rebukes return'd upon him? And Wo is to him indeed, when he ſpeaks againſt Mens Hypocritical Pretences to Piety and Goodneſs, whilſt both their Principles and Practices ſhew 'em to have nothing leſs at Heart than either; when he corrects them for their audacious Diſſembling with God, by playing faſt and looſe in his Worſhip, which they pretend to perform ſometimes in the Church, as God orders by his Miniſters, and ſometimes in a Way of meer human Invention, quite contrary to it; or when he taxes 'em for making *Gain their Godlineſs*, and proſtituting their Religion to the vileſt End, making it a Matter of meer Worldly Craft, and State Policy, and playing all the Pranks

with it, that the *Devil*, in *Form* of *an Angel of Light*, can tempt them to.

Whoever of us, my Reverend Brethren, has the Courage (and I hope we all have) to make a Stand againſt theſe encroaching abominable Sins, and oppoſe their Progreſs, muſt expect to be very ill treated and *deſpitefully us'd* for his Pains, by a *crooked and perverſe Generation.*

Wo to any one of us, if againſt theſe prevailing Sins, (obeying the Apoſtle's Command to *Timothy*, 2 Ep. 4. 2.) He *preaches the Word, is inſtant in Seaſon, out of Seaſon, reproves, exhorts, rebukes.* Where, by the Way, we may obſerve the Apoſtle allows of no ſuch *Unſeaſonableneſs*, as ſome People would plead, in preaching againſt any Sin. He ſuppoſes indeed, that this would be pretended by ſome Sinners, but by no Means permits *Timothy* to hearken to it, and neglect his Duty, but on the contrary exhorts him to be more diligent and urgent therein, and to bear the Inſults he might receive for the ſame, *with all Patience and long Suffering.*

This great Apoſtle, indeed, knew it to be the propereſt Seaſon to correct and be ſtrict againſt any Sin, when 'tis grown ſo ſtout and impudent as to plead a Privilege to be ſet alone, for this ſhews it to have gotten too great an Head already, and that by farther Indulgence, (which 'tis craving after for this Purpoſe) it may ſo root and eſtabliſh it ſelf, as to become unconquerable, therefore muſt it be now high time to take it down, e're this happens.

For inſtance, can there be a fitter Seaſon to urge the Duty of Subjection to Princes with Zeal, and in its full Extent, than when thoſe horrid Principles of Rebellion, that not long ago laid our Church and Nation in Blood and Ruins, (the dire Effects of which, we to this Day feel and lament) are openly avowed and countenanc'd?

If when Separation from the Church ſpreads it ſelf, and daily ſpawns into innumerable Sects and Parties, grows aſſuming and imperious over the lawful Paſtors of Chriſt's Flock, it be not a fit Time to preach againſt Hereſie and Schiſm, our wiſe Directors would do well to tell us when it will be; and we gueſs at the Time they would alot, *viz. When 'twould be too late, and to little Purpoſe.*

But to return, I ſay, Whatever Miniſter of the Goſpel undertakes, according to his Office, the Cure of Mens Epidemical Sins, with a due Strictneſs and Concern, he muſt look to be reckon'd a very impertinent, rude and troubleſome Man at the beſt, becauſe, forſooth, he refuſes to make a Complement of his Religion, as well as Conſcience, to ſome great Perſon, or prevailing

prevailing Party; nay, 'tis much if, as St. *Paul* was, he's not for this call'd a *pestilent Fellow*, and *Mover of Sedition*; tho' at the same time he's preaching up the peaceable Doctrine of absolute Submission, and full Obedience to the higher Powers for Conscience-sake. To do this, I say, is reckon'd a very heinous Crime by some People, and those guilty of it deem'd worthy no manner of Favour; if any of us expects this, he must take the quite contrary Course; which when ever any do, we may well reckon their base temporizing Practices of this Kind, another Ground and Occasion of Mens Offences against the Clergy, *viz.*

Fifthly, The cowardly and fawning Compliance of some (if such there be) who, instead of Preaching the *Word of God*, *as of Sincerity*, *as of God*, *as in the Sight of God*, as the Apostle speaks, 2 *Cor.* 2. 17. *corrupt* and debase it, making it subservient to worldly Ends, and wicked Purposes; as also the Lukewarmness and Indifferency of others, (if any such are found) in fulfilling their Ministry; which in Times of Hazard and Peril of the Faith, is a Kind of Treachery too, for which, how they'll one Day be able to answer, they'd do well to consider, and have our Saviour's Words always in Remembrance, *Mark* 8. 38. *Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my Words, in this adulterous and sinful Generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be asham'd when He cometh in the Glory of his Father, with the holy Angels.* These Matters, I say, give farther Occasion of Scandal against the Clergy. For were there none that flatter'd, countenanc'd and encourag'd Men in their Sins, that taught them how to palliate, excuse and defend 'em; none to *dawb* 'em over and cry *Peace, Peace*, at every Allarm of Conscience, nor any that neglected out of Fear or Slothfulness, to reprehend and rebuke 'em, as they deserv'd, Men would not be so very fond of their Sins, so stubborn and obstinate in 'em, and consequently not so full of Disgust and Resentment, so peevish, angry, and furious, at those faithful and strict Physicians of their Souls, who fully lay open their Danger, and search their Malady to the Bottom.

Not to say how just Occasion of Offence this gives to all true Lovers of Christ's Church, when they see the Honour of the Priesthood (wherein the Glory of that spotless Church consists, and even the Good of Christianity it self is much concern'd) thus prostituted and deserted, by its own Professors, who ought to *adorn it in all things*, and spend their Blood in its Defence, as our Saviour did in establishing it.

How far, and in what Instances, any Preacher of the Gospel may comply with the innocent Prejudices and Scruples of well-meaning Men, in Religious Matters, I'll not pretend to determine:

mine: But for him to do this out of any other Ends than the Good of Souls, and the Furtherance of the Gospel, as out of State Policy, Worldly Interest, or Self-Indulgence, and that towards Men of stubborn, perverse, and schismatical Tempers, open Enemies to the Church, and Disturbers of its Peace, and such as seek and watch all Opportunities to ruin it, I think we may pronounce most abominable Treachery and Perfidiousness in him towards God and Christ, whose Cause he has undertaken. *Such are deceitful Workers, that serve not the Lord Jesus Christ, but their own Belly*; as the Apostle speaks of 'em, *Rom.* 16. 18.

Let us consider what the Scripture directs in this Matter. St. *Paul* orders *Titus*, Chap. 2. 15. *to speak, exhort, and rebuke, with all Authority*; and then he adds, *Let no Man despise thee*; plainly enough intimating, that the Way not to be despised, was duely to execute his Authority.

And would every Minister of the Gospel act up to his Commission, and fulfil his Office in all things belonging to it, the Clergy might expect to meet with more Regard than commonly they do, and thus better maintain the Dignity of their Character, than by a base Compliance with the unreasonable Desires of wicked and designing Men; and so would they be in a better Capacity to fulfil that great Charge of *Watching for Mens Souls*, to which a Reverence for their Character is absolutely necessary.

And what St. *Paul*'s own Behaviour was herein, with Relation to the Judaizing Christians, we have an Account, *Gal.* 2. 4, 5. where speaking of *False Brethren, unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out their Liberty, which they had in Christ Jesus, that they might bring 'em into Bondage, he says he gave Place to 'em no not for a Moment, that the Truth of the Gospel might continue.* And Verse 11. he even withstood the Apostle St. *Peter to the Face, because he was to be blam'd*, for his dissembling Compliance with the *Jews*.

I speak not all this, my Reverend Brethren, in the least to reflect on any Person in the sacred Ministry, (far be it from me, to become an Instance my self of that Offence I am speaking against) I am very ready to hope none who bears this Character has so little Regard to it, as himself to villify and injure it wilfully; but since all of us are liable to be carried away with Infirmities and Temptations, and to be impos'd upon by the cunning Devices of the subtle Adversaries to our Order, I humbly crave Leave to be yours, as I am mine own Monitor herein.

Only one thing I cannot well pass by without Notice, and that is the Practice of some Separatists among us, who usurp the

the Miniſtry, and whom I doubt we have too much Reaſon to tax of Temporizing, and becoming Men-Pleaſers, in their Teachings, ſuiting their Doctrines to the Temper and corrupt Inclinations of a degenerate Age, by their ſeemingly *good Words* and *fair Speeches*, not only *deluding the Hearts of the ſimple*, but prejudicing them likewiſe againſt the lawful and ſincere Paſtors of Chriſt's Flock. And the Apoſtle foretells as much, 2 *Pet.* 2. 1. *There ſhall be falſe Teachers among you, who ſhall privily bring in damnable Hereſies, and many ſhall follow their pernicious Ways, by reaſon of whom the Way of Truth ſhall be evil ſpoken of.* And when it thus happens to the Truth it ſelf, how the Preachers of it are like to fare, we know very well.

I might exemplifie all this, would the Time permit, in our Saviour, and the Scribes and Phariſees among the *Jews*, thoſe *blind Guides*, who had corrupted the Law, and *made void the Commandments of God by their Traditions*, and perverſe Expoſitions, and thereby ſo monſtrouſly prejudic'd the Generality of that People againſt Chriſt and his Doctrine, that *having Eyes they would not ſee*; *Ears, and would not hear*; *Underſtandings, and would not underſtand it.*

Thus they *ſhut up the Kingdom of God againſt Men, neither entring in themſelves, nor ſuffering them that were entering to go in.* But I haſten to my Second Propoſition.

II. To ſhew how unreaſonable and unjuſt theſe Offences are. And this I ſhall briefly do in ſome Particulars; as,

1. Theſe Offences againſt the Clergy will appear unreaſonable and unjuſt, becauſe they are many of 'em taken up on Account of thoſe things that they cannot help, and ſuch indeed as, after all, are no real Prejudice to the Exerciſe of their Office, but quite contrary, many times an Advantage thereunto.

Hither I reduce all thoſe perſonal Reflections made on the Clergy, concerning their Poverty and Meanneſs of Condition, and their Misfortunes in the World, as alſo concerning their Manners and Converſations among Men.

As, what Fault is it in a Clergy-man, not to be born of a great Family, and inherit an Eſtate? And that he gets none, is perhaps more owing to his Honeſty than want of Merit.

And whoever conſiders the great Depredations on the Church, and the many Arts us'd to *rob God of his Tythes and Offerings*, for which he pronounces a double Curſe, in his Prophet *Malachi*, Ch. 3. 9. needs not be at a Loſs for the true Reaſon of the Clergy's Poverty; and he that thinks this a Scandal to 'em, would do well to turn the Reflection, and tell us, how ſcandalous 'tis for others to grow rich, and ſtrut in their Spoils. And as for their Misfortunes, theſe ought certainly to entitle 'em to Mens Pity rather

rather than Contempt. And were there but all reaſonable Allowance made for Human Infirmity, and the neceſſary Intercourſe of Life, there would appear but little Grounds for all thoſe ſpiteful Cenſures on their Manners, they are many times ſo blacken'd with. And after all, what ſignify theſe things to the Exerciſe of their Function? Perhaps they may be the better qualify'd for't many times by reaſon of their mean Condition. The Apoſtle ſays, 1 *Cor.* 1. 24. *God hath choſen the fooliſh things of the World to confound the Wiſe, and weak things of the World to confound the things that are mighty, and baſe things of the World, and things that are deſpiſed, hath God choſen, yea and things that are not, to bring to naught things that are, that no Fleſh ſhould glory in his Preſence.*

And even the Immoralities of the Clergy (if at any time they be found upon 'em) hinder not (unleſs it be Mens own Faults) the Efficacy of their Miniſtry, which comes from God, whoſe Grace may be convey'd to all true penitent Believers by a wicked Inſtrument. Paul *plants, and* Apollos *waters, but God gives the Increaſe.* And to ſilence all Cavil about the Clergy's being ſeen perhaps in ill Company, we need but conſider what our Saviour told the *Jews* in this Caſe, *the whole need not a Phyſician, but they that are ſick.* Here then you ſee ſuch an one's moſt needed; for where ſhould the Phyſician be more properly than ſometimes among his Patients.

2. Mens Offences againſt the Clergy will be found to be very unreaſonable and unjuſt, in that they are ſometimes taken up on account of that which ought to entitle 'em to the higheſt Eſteem and Veneration, *viz.* the Authority they bear, as they are the immediate Miniſters and Ambaſſadors of the Lord of Hoſts and King of Glory. By His Commiſſion alone they act, and by Him they are authorized in all things requiſite for the Care of Souls, as his Son Chriſt himſelf was, who *ſent* his Apoſtles, he tells us, *as the Father had ſent him*; and ſo theſe were to ſend others, who ſhould continue down the Divine Miſſion, never to ceaſe, till the End of the World; whereby Chriſt's Promiſe *to be with 'em*, is fulfill'd. If there be Reſpect due then to any Dignity on Earth, 'tis to them who bear ſo immediate a Relation to the Almighty Sovereign of the World, from whom all Power and Authority come.

And the Folly of Mens Offences in this kind, is evident from nothing more than their perverſe and abſurd way of arguing againſt the Authority of the Prieſthood, contrary to all known Rules of Reaſoning. For they ſeldom ever enter into the Merits of the Cauſe, ſo as throughly to examine what may be produc'd for the Truth of it, *i. e.* Whether or

no God has really given the Clergy that Authority they claim. But evading this, they fly presently to decry and vilify the thing it self, and so try to render it odious, and not worthy Belief, tho' the Scripture gives most plain Testimony of it, *which having Eyes they see not* themselves, and endeavour to prejudice and blind others against it. But I hasten,

3. To another Instance of this Point, *viz.* Mens being offended at the Clergy many times for no other Reason, but sincerely doing their Duty. 'Tis their Office and Imployment, their High Calling, and Charge committed to 'em by God himself, and which they have most solemnly undertaken, and strictly oblig'd themselves to perform, *viz. to preach the Word, and be instant therein at all Seasons, exhorting, reproving and rebuking with all that Authority* they have committed to 'em by God for these Purposes.

Thus are they *to feed the Flock of Christ, which he purchas'd with his own Blood*, to *watch and labour for Mens Souls, and persevere therein with all Patience and Long-suffering, doing nothing with Partiality and Respect of Persons, nor having any in Admiration because of Advantage.* But we are, my Reverend Brethren, to acquaint all alike with the Truth of the Gospel to the full, and correct all manner of Sin in every one; of these things *we are to cry aloud, and spare not*; and if we refuse or neglect so to do, we are slothful and disobedient Servants of our heavenly Lord; nay we are false, treacherous and perfidious to God himself, which must needs one Day call down his Vengeance upon us. *Woe to us then, if we preach not the Gospel*; if we prove such blind and deceitful Workmen as God complain'd of heretofore in his Prophet, *Isa.* 56. 10. comparing 'em to *dumb Dogs, that cannot bark, sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber*, we must expect God will *require the Blood of all those Souls at our hands*, that have perish'd for want of that Knowledge and Warning we ought to have given 'em. Hear how plainly God speaks this in his Prophet *Ezekiel*, ch. 3. 17,18. *Son of Man, I have made thee a Watchman to the House of* Israel, *therefore hear the Word at my Mouth, and give them Warning from me. When I said unto the Wicked, thou shalt surely dye, and thou givest him not Warning, nor speakest to warn the Wicked from his wicked Way to save his Life, the same wicked Man shall die in his Iniquity, but his Blood will I require at thy Hand.* Considering which then we may hope, my Reverend Brethren, there will be none so very unreasonable and unjust, none so unkind and injurious to us, as to require us thus to neglect our Duty, and betray our solemn Trust, and so to hazard our immortal Souls; nay, and I may say according to the Prophet, their own too. Which Matter will give us a

4*th* Instance of the great Unreasonableness and Injustice of Mens Offences against the Clergy, *viz.* their being most unreasonably unjust toward themselves, in that Injury they do their Souls, by depriving 'em of the spiritual Advice and Assistance of them that are appointed by God *to watch for 'em*, without which they are like to perish and be undone for ever, being left only to the blind Direction and deceitful Guidance of corrupt Human Nature: To rescue Men from which unhappy State, the Office and Imployment of the Clergy are by God most graciously design'd. Accordingly the Ministers of the Gospel are to do all they can *to bring Men out of Darkness unto Light, and from the Power of Satan unto God.* Which being so important, and withal difficult a Matter, much too mighty for Human Strength, and not to be trusted with any mortal Power, God himself takes the Matter into his own Hands, and impowers a set Order of Men, from himself, for this Business; keeping it thus under his own Almighty Direction and Authority, whereby 'tis more likely to be effectually accompliſh'd, than by the vain Methods of Human Ordering, whereby Men think to go to Heaven which way they please, and so most absurdly as well as presumptuously many times prescribe the Clergy a Way to do their own Business set 'em by God; expecting to hear nothing from 'em, but what flatters and gratifies one vain headstrong Humour, or evil Lust or other. Which would be indeed (what some Men are plainly driving at in their clamorous Offences against the Clergy for doing their Duty) to make a most wicked and inconsistent Business of Religion, whilst it must be calculated for all the wild, contradictory Opinions, and corrupt Inclinations of Mankind, and made comply with 'em at every turn; not to say at how cheap and vile a Rate this would set Salvation, which thus must not cost a Man the Expence of one single Lust he has a mind to: Whereas the pure holy Gospel we are to preach, requires the Rooting out, and mortifying of 'em all; and this is what the sacred Function we bear, aims at, and contributes to in all its Offices. And considering the great Stubbornness of these Lusts, and the mighty Sway they bear with Men, we had need enough to be very strict in preaching this Gospel, and rigorous in the due Execution of this our Function in all Particulars, being very watchful, and plying the whole Artillery of Heaven against the *Strong Holds* of Sin and Satan, lest they sally out, surprize, and prevail over those unwary Souls committed to our Care.

And what if some refuse thus to do their Duty, complying with Mens Lusts, and flattering 'em in their Sins, is this any Reason why others should do the like? Or indeed is it not rather an Argu-

Argument for 'em to be the more ſtrict and careful herein, that the Cauſe of Religion be not wholly given up, and Sin left to reign uncontroll'd. And for any Men to be offended at us for theſe our kind Pains, ſo much for their Good, ſhews 'em to be moſt ſtupidly regardleſs of their everlaſting Welfare, than which I think there can't be a more deſperately mad and wretched Folly thought on.

Does not every one act otherwiſe in the common Concerns of Life? For who goes to a Lawyer for Advice about preſerving his Eſtate, that would not be willing to hear his Caſe juſtly ſtated, and even the worſt of it ſet forth to him, and be ſhewn where and in what Point the Danger of loſing it lies? A bodily Phyſician is born with, nay lik'd the better, for treating a ſtubborn Diſtemper as roughly as it deſerves: But alas! the Soul's Phyſician, and Advocate for Heaven, (as if this was not worth gaining, nor that preſerving) is the only Perſon that muſt act contrary to his Office, and deceive thoſe he undertakes for. He alone muſt comply with all the vain Humours and wilful Deſires of Men to their infinite Hurt, and do nothing for 'em in a Matter of the greateſt moment, but what they are fooliſhly pleas'd to like; *i. e.* he muſt cheat 'em out of their everlaſting Happineſs, and court 'em into eternal Ruin. To ſuch deſperate Fools as theſe, I ſhall only propoſe what God ſays of the *Jews*, *The Prophets propheſy falſly, and my People love to have it ſo, and what will ye do in the End thereof?* Jer. 5. 31. Which brings on the

III. Third Propoſition, *viz.* The ill Effects and fatal Conſequences of Mens Offences againſt the Clergy. And the Time only permits me barely to mention two of each, which for Brevity ſake, and becauſe of their Alliance, I ſhall couple together. And we may reckon one very ill Effect of this Matter to be Infidelity.

When Men once take an Offence, and ſo conceive a Prejudice againſt the Clergy, how natural is it for 'em to disbelieve their Doctrine, and have little or no Regard for any thing they do in their Function?

Our Belief, even of common Truths, and Reſpect to Mens ordinary Actions, uſually depend very much on that Eſteem and Authority the Relaters and Doers of 'em bear with us; which is much more ſo in Religion, which Men are more averſe to than any thing, and glad of any Excuſe (and none more ready and fitter than Clergy-ſcandal) to ſhift it off, and to take up with Infidelity. *How can ye believe, which receive Honour one of another, and ſeek not the Honour that cometh from God only?* as our Saviour ſpeaks to this purpoſe, *John* 5. 44.

The mischievous Consequence of which is, God's taking away the Means of Faith and Grace from a People, who thus wickedly abuse 'em, and giving 'em to others, who will profit by 'em. He plainly dealt thus with the *Jews*, (and the Apostle tells us they are Examples to us) as our Saviour foretold he would, *Matth.* 21. 43. *Therefore I say unto you, the Kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a Nation bringing forth the Fruits thereof.* And as God thus treats whole Nations, so also does he particular Persons, as our Saviour speaks, *Mark* 4. 24, 25. *And to you that hear shall more be given, and he that hath not, from him shall be taken, even that which he hath.* To the like purpose the Apostle, *God resisteth the Proud, but giveth Grace to the Humble.* Now by these Means Men become harden'd and resolute in their Sins, and so are exasperated against all that endeavour to turn 'em from 'em. Which brings on another ill Effect of this Matter, with its fatal Consequence, *viz.*

2. A revengeful persecuting Spirit, whereby resolutely wicked Men usually tyrannize over, afflict and murder those faithful Ministers of Christ, they are offended at, for the constant and zealous Discharge of their Duty, without any other Regard, but to the Honour of that Gospel they preach, and the Good of those Souls they *watch for.* Thus they endeavour that others also may despise and reject their Doctrine, and prove no better for't than themselves.

Which Hellish Cruelty is attended with the fatal Consequence of God's Fury pour'd out on these impious Persecutors of his good and faithful Servants, to vindicate his own Honour, thus injur'd in his Ministers, and avenge their Blood, the former of which he's *most jealous* and tender of, and the latter is *most precious in his sight.*

And of this we need no other Instance than that given us of the *Jews.* Our Saviour thus speaks of 'em, *Mat.* 23. 34. *Behold I send unto you Prophets, and wise Men, and Scribes, and some of them ye shall kill and crucify, and some of them ye shall scourge in your Synagogues, and persecute them from City to City, that upon you may come all the righteous Blood shed upon the Earth. Verily I say unto you, all these things shall be required of this Generation.* And accordingly so it fell out, after they had crucify'd our Saviour, and put his Apostles to Death. Whereby *they fill'd up the Measure of their Fathers Iniquity,* who use *to kill the Prophets and stone them that were sent unto them,* the Blood of whom constantly cry'd to Heaven for Vengeance, and was often heard and punish'd in the Fathers themselves, but never to the full till in their Posterity, on whom was exhausted all the Store

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Divine Vengeance behind, which had been gathering againſt this final Execution for many Years.

And if we would know the true Reaſon of all this, our Saviour will inform us, in what he tells his Apoſtles, *Whoſoever deſpiſeth you, deſpiſeth me; and whoſoever deſpiſeth me, deſpiſeth him that ſent me*, Luke 10. 16.

So that now all Affronts and Indignities done to Chriſt's Miniſters are indeed offer'd to God himſelf; they are an impious Violation of the Authority of Heaven, and a moſt daring Inſult on the Majeſty of the Almighty, who is a God moſt ſtrictly jealous of his Honour, and a terrible Avenger of all Injuries done to it. Of which therefore whenever the Clergy are ſo kind as to warn Men, they ought not to be tax'd (as uſually they are) of *magnifying their Office*, preaching up themſelves, and trumpeting out their own Praiſes, whilſt they only publiſh that Honour and Reſpect due to their Character. For an Honour 'tis you ſee, that they do not vainly arrogate to themſelves, but ſuch as they have a juſter Title to, and better Security for, than any one can claim for the higheſt Dignity on Earth. 'Tis granted 'em by God himſelf, from him they immediately hold it, and therefore he ſees that due Reſpect be paid to it, and thinks himſelf concern'd to puniſh all profane Violation of it.

I ſeek not mine own Glory, there is one that ſeeketh and judgeth, as our Saviour ſpeaks with relation to this matter, *John* 8. 50.

So that I muſt ſay, Honouring the Prieſthood (which cannot be done by diſhonouring and ſcandalizing them that bear it) is as much a Chriſtian Duty as any thing whatever, and therefore the Miniſters of the Goſpel are oblig'd to preach it up at any time: And I hope 'twill not be thought unſeaſonable at preſent, when 'tis conſider'd how maliciouſly the Clergy have been aſpers'd and abus'd of late, and that by the very *Beaſts of the People* (as the Pſalmiſt calls 'em.) Indeed 'tis a vile Practice, beſt becoming ſuch, and therefore we might hope Perſons of Figure would have ſome regard to their own Character at leaſt, and not join with 'em. But what wonder to ſee this, when the Sacred Order it ſelf hath been ſo openly and profanely inſulted, and ſuch things ſaid, and ready to be done againſt it, by ſome People, as I believe were never before ſuffer'd, much leſs approv'd of, in any Chriſtian Nation whatever. But we now hope for better times to come. I haſten therefore,

IV. Fourthly and laſtly, To ask your Leave, my Reverend Brethren, to propoſe two or three practical Rules to you, and my ſelf, from the whole, wherein I ſhall be very brief, knowing that I ſpeak to ſuch, who are better able to direct themſelves. 1. Then,

1. Then, my Reverend Brethren, are Men on so many Accounts, as you have heard, apt to take Offence at us, this should mightily perswade us, methinks, not to be offended at one another; and that, not only because we are to be *Patterns and Examples to the Flock*, (too many of which would gladly follow us in this Particular) but also because we have all a common Interest in the Priesthood, and so must share of its Honour, and Dishonour. For when *one Member suffers, all the Members suffer with it.* Shall we bite and devour one another then, and enter into Combinations and Conspiracies against our selves? God forbid! For this is likewise to conspire, like the Traytor *Judas*, against our Lord and Master, Christ himself, and God that sent us.

We of all Persons ought to understand the Dignity of our own Character, and the Honour belonging to it, and therefore should be the fartheſt from Offences against it.

We have Enemies too many already in the World, and therefore have the less Reason to increase the Number, by becoming such to our selves. Behold, says our Saviour to his Apostles (the more to endear 'em to one another) *I send you forth as Sheep in the midst of Wolves*, and their Conduct was to be *wise as Serpents, and harmless as Doves*; harmless, no doubt of it, towards one another, and so wise as not to destroy themselves.

This Wisdom, my Reverend Brethren, let us take care to use against the designing Subtilties of those Men, who would draw us into Factions and Parties against our selves, only to serve their Turns of us, and bring about their wicked Purposes against us. Especially let us take Care, out of Dread of the Divine Vengeance, not to be found herding in a Party, that express an open, and avow'd Enmity, and Hatred to our Order; if we *partake with these Men in their Sins* (as I fear we can't well avoid one way or other so doing, whilst we are join'd in any Interest with them) what can we expect but to share their Fate too?

2. Are Men so very apt to take, and frame Offences against us; this should make us all very careful to give as little just Occasion as possible for 'em.

We are all of us indeed subject to Infirmities, as well as others, and so may have our Faults and Failings too; for which Reason, Men should indeed *bear with us a little*, and we our selves be continually on the Watch against 'em, having so many Eyes over us, and People being so apt to magnify, and aggravate every little Slip, and most unjustly turn all our Failings into severe Reflections on the sacred Order we bear.

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Considering these things, as the Apostle advises, 2 *Cor.* 6. 3. *Let us give none Offence in any thing, that the Ministry be not blamed, but in all things approving our selves as the Ministers of Christ, in much Patience,* Purity, and Holiness of Life. Let us be *Patterns to our Flocks, and Examples to the Believers, in Word, in Conversation, in Charity, in Spirit, in Faith, in Purity; following after Godliness, Faith, Love, Patience, Meekness,* as St. *Paul* orders *Timothy*, 1 Ep. 6. 11. & 1 Ep. 4. 12.

But more especially, my Reverend Brethren, let us, according to the Apostle's Order, *Make full Proof of our Ministry, and keep that committed to our Trust*, like good Stewards, *let us be found faithful herein*, and dare act in all things belonging to our Function, as those who are authorized and assisted from Heaven. Other Duties we are oblig'd to in common with other Men; but to *fight the good Fight of Faith;* and preserve it, is the proper Duty of a Clergy-man. To be faithful in what the Apostle charges *Timothy*, in the solemnest Manner imaginable, before *God, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect Angels.*

And what his own Practice in this Case was, we have Account, *Acts* 20. where he says, *With many Temptations, Bonds and Afflictions, that abode him in every City, not counting his Life dear unto himself, he testified the Gospel of the Grace of God, not keeping back any of it, nor ceasing to warn every one Night and Day with Tears.* Should any of us then, my Reverend Brethren, contrary to this holy Apostle's Command and Example, not *testify this Gospel* fully to every one in its genuine Truth, and Purity, according to the best of his Skill; but be tempted to *corrupt* and *keep back any* part of it, being partial and dissembling, and *preferring one above another* in the preaching thereof; should he be negligent and slothful, cowardly and fearful, in the grand Affair of Souls, he has undertaken, 'twould be a just Ground of Offence against him, he would thus prove an high Scandal and Reproach to his sacred Function; which therefore, I hope, we all as much detest and abhor, as every good Man will abhor and detest us, if we are ever guilty of it.

Our other Failings in common Duties may be excus'd many times by the Plea of human Frailties; but the Breach of Duty in relation to fulfilling our Ministry, seems such an high and deliberate Act of Hypocrisy and Perfidiousness, that nothing can well be pleaded in its Defence: For 'tis acting directly contrary to that momentous Business, wherein the Honour of God, and Good of Souls are jointly concern'd, and which we have most solemnly undertaken, and oblig'd our selves by the strictest Obligations of Oaths and Engagements, to perform; 'tis moreover betraying the high Trust of Heaven, and giving up the sacred *Depositum* of the Faith, committed to our Charge, into the Hands of those Men, who design nothing less by their Importunities for it, but to destroy it. For which how much *asham'd* of us Christ, as he tells us, will be hereafter, *when he cometh in the Glory of his Father and the holy Angels*; and how justly we shall then be assign'd by him our *Portion with the Unbelievers*, none of us can be ignorant.

I have but one Matter more to offer, my Reverend Brethren, which is, *Thirdly* and *Lastly*, That after having taken due Care not to afford any real Occasion of Offences, we learn to disregard and despise such, as upon no just Grounds are fram'd against us, but are the pure Effects of Envy and Malice to us.

Let

Let us ſo deſpiſe theſe, as to look upon 'em, what truly they are, a real Reproach to their Authors, but a Credit and Praiſe to us, being an Evidence that we ſhew no baſe Compliance with Mens Lulls, and dare do our Duty, tho' we are ſure to ſuffer for it.

And let us farther learn therefore, To deſpiſe 'em, as not to fear the Threats, or be concern'd for the Injuries that ariſe from 'em many times to beat us off from the faithful Diſcharge of the Duties of our Function. Theſe things are but Tryals of our Sincerity in God's Service, which his Providence permits to happen, for a Proof of our Strength and Courage, and alſo to afford us an Opportunity of advancing our ſelves the higher in Chriſt's Kingdom of Glory hereafter. Out of which Tryals God in his due time will deliver us, and always affords us his own bleſſed Aſſiſtance under 'em. In the Power of whoſe Spirit (more largely communicated to us under our Conflicts for the Faith) we ſhall be then ſtrongeſt, when in all other Reſpects we are weakeſt. *Our Strength will be made perfect in Weakneſs*, as the Apoſtle ſays, *Moſt gladly therefore will I take pleaſure in Infirmities, in Reproaches, in Neceſſities, in Perſecutions, in Diſtreſſes for Chriſt's ſake, for when I am weak, then am I ſtrong*, 2 Cor. 12. 10.

In a Word, Let us learn ſo to deſpiſe all envious and ſpiteful Offences againſt us, as to forgive 'em, which is the nobleſt Way of deſpiſing 'em. Let us never, therefore, concern our ſelves to return, or ſo much as reſent any, knowing where the Injuries will light at laſt, even on the Heads of thoſe that prepar'd 'em for us: Let us therefore rather pity ſuch poor miſtaken Wretches, and afford our charitable Aſſiſtance for their Converſion, *Praying for thoſe that deſpitefully uſe us and perſecute us; being reviled let us bleſs, being perſecuted let us ſuffer it, being defam'd, let us entreat*, &c.

So ſhall we truly profeſs and adorn the venerable Character we bear, ſo ſhall we tread in the Steps of our Great Forerunners and Examples of Sufferings, the noble Army of Martyr'd Apoſtles and Prophets, and Chriſt Jeſus their bleſſed Captain and Founder; who *All did Good for Evil, return'd bleſſing for curſing, and recommending themſelves to God, that judgeth righteouſly*, with their laſt Breath *pray'd for their very Murderers*.

And ſo ſhall we, for our Encouragement, obtain the ſame high Reward they now enjoy, and which is laid up for all them, who with the like Patience and Reſignation to God, the like Courage, Firmneſs and Conſtancy, ſhall *fight the good Fight, and keep the Faith, even a Crown of Glory, which God the Righteous Judge ſhall give us at the laſt Day.*

I ſhall cloſe up all with an excellent Collect of our Church, us'd on the firſt Martyr St. *Stephen*'s Day.

Grant, O Lord, that in all our Sufferings here upon Earth, for the Teſtimony of thy Truth, we may ſtedfaſtly look up to Heaven, and by Faith behold the Glory that ſhall be reveal'd, and being fill'd with the Holy Ghoſt, may learn to love and bleſs our Perſecutors, by the Example of thy firſt Martyr St. Stephen, *who pray'd for his Murderers to thee, O Bleſſed Jeſus, who ſtandeſt at the Right Hand of God, to ſuccour all thoſe that ſuffer for thee, our only Mediator and Advocate.* Amen.

FINIS.